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ABSTRACT

Socio-emotional education has been given very little attention in Finland, either on the general level or within specific subjects. To examine the empathy level of Helsinki students and the influence of an empathy campaign on the development of empathy, 665 students, aged 11 to 18, (49 percent female, 51 percent male) were exposed to an empathy campaign. The campaign was presented according to various intensity levels from the mildest level, which consisted of a symbolic poster on the wall and a morning ceremony, to the most intensive level, which consisted of a week-long theme program planned by students and teachers. A control group consisting of 92 students received no empathy campaign. The Mehrabian-Epstein Scale on emotional empathy and teacher and peer ratings of prosocial behavior were used as pre- and post-test measures of campaign effectiveness. An analysis of the results showed that empathy can be increased through school campaigns when the campaign is intensive, and when the students take part in the planning and organizing. Overall, girls were significantly more empathetic than boys. However, the emotional receptiveness of the test group boys increased during the campaign significantly more than other boys or girls in the control group. Positive changes were greatest in the lower grade students of the test group. The most even development of empathy took place in the group which had the most intensive campaign. (BL)

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EMPATHY IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

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EMPATHY IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The aim of the study was to examine the empathy level of school students and the influence of the empathy campaign on the development of empathy. The students tested were 5th graders (aged 11-12), 8th graders (aged 14-15) and higher secondary school 2nd graders (aged 17-18). The prestudy was made on 665 students of whom 49% were girls and 51% boys. 24% of the students were from Swedish speaking schools. The test group consisted of 20 schools in the four cities of the capital area. The control group was formed equivalent grades in three schools in Lahti (a city 100 km north of Helsinki) - altogether 92 students of whom 54% were girls and 46% boys. Prestudy was carried out nine months before poststudy. During that time the empathy education campaign varied a lot in intensity in different schools: the mildest campaign consisted of a hedgehog poster on the wall (the symbol of the campaign) and a morning ceremony; the most intensive campaign was a week long theme program on empathy planned by the students and teachers who took part in it. No campaign was directed to the control group. The methods used were the Mehrabian-Epstein scale on emotional empathy and appraisals by the teachers and the fellow students on prosocial behaviour and empathy.
Girls were significantly more empathetic than boys according three measures. Empathy mean scores seemed to increase with age up to the age of 19. Students who were empathetic according to self-reports were considered empathetic also by their fellow students. The effects of the campaign were examined on the basis of the changes in the empathy scores between pre- and poststudy. The emotional receptiveness of the test group boys had increased during the campaign significantly more than other boys or girls. Positive changes were greatest in the low grade students of the test group; their emotions rejecting and denying had decresed. The most even development of empathy took place in the group which had the most intensive campaign; their emotional receptiveness increased particularly. The changes in the control group were similar to those in the test group which had the least intensive campaign. The most interesting discovery was that empathy can really be increased in schools through campaigns when the campaigns are intensive enough and when the students may take part in the planning and organizing of the campaigns. Mere information of empathy is not enough.

EMPATHY IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Introduction

The motivation to the empathy campaign was the fact that the behaviour and social contacts of young people have become ever more superficial and materialistic. Cases of ruthless assault and battery on passers by without any reason can be mentioned as extreme examples of such conduct by some young persons. When interviewed those quilty assaults it was found out that they had seldom realized that their victim had felt strong physical pain. They often lack the ability of temporary identification another person`s - the victim´s - status and to understand him. They had no empathy. When analyzing further the background of those with behaviour disorders it was noticed that they lacked close and warm human contacts on their social or educational surroundings.

The socio-emotional school education has been given very little attention in Finland both on the general level and in connection with the subjects taught. The importance of emotional education is emphasized in the report by the Committee on Curriculum Planning in the comprehensive school, 1970 as well as in the equivalent report for the higher secondary school, 1977. However, in practice the demand for knowledge has increased at the expence of emotional education. The same situation prevails also in vocational training schools.

Campaign

The campaign called "Beneath the Surface" aimed at the young by encouraging positive behaviour including paying attention to fellow students and neighbours. The method used in the campaign was empathy. The aim of the campaign was to affect the everyday behaviour of the

children and turn it to a more prosocial direction by changing attitudes in general and toward other people.

The empathy education campaign varied a lot in intensity in different schools. The mildest campaign consisted of a hedgehog poster on the wall (the symbol of the campaign) and a morning ceremony. In schools which organised a medium-intensity campaign, the empathy theme was also discussed in class, either in the context of regular school subjects or devoting some lessions to the subject. The most intensive campaign was a week long theme program on empathy planned by the students and teachers who took part in it.

The following instructions were delivered to the schools for the organization of the campaign.

The teacher has a central role also in the empathy campaign. For example the following methods can be used in the campaign.

1. The empathy theme can be brought up in class in the context of regular school subjects, or a whole lesson can be devoted to the subject. The teacher should first explain the term and concept of "empathy". Stories, newspaper articles, music, and possibly radio and television programs can be used to illustrate the subject. The students will then be allowed to discuss the matter on the basis of the information they have received, and finally they can express their own views on the subject through artistic work, e.g. by producing stories and poems, drawings, musical performances, group work, plays, etc.

2. School clubs can offer good possibilities for more extensive working on the subject. For example, plays, musical performances, collections of stories, drawings and posters can be produced.

3. The empathy theme can be brought up in the morning ceremonies. The students should be encouraged to take part in planning and performing the ceremonies.

4. An "empathy week" or an "empathy day" can be crganised, during which the theme will be approached using different methods and points of view. Some schools have already organised an empathy week and the experiences have been very encouraging. The fact that the entire personnel and all the students of the school have been involved in organising the week's program has made the atmosphere very enthusiastic.

5. A school festival can also be organised during which the results of the students' work will be presented. Also parents will be invited to this occasion. It is very important that also the homes of the students will be informed about the idea of empathy.

Joint work groups of teachers and students have proved successful in producing new ideas.

The material that was sent to schools included the following programme of an empathy week that had been organised in one school.

The idea of an empathy week was first taken up at a teachers' meeting. The next step was to listen to the students' proposals in class and to make a general inquiry about the willingness to organise the campaign. The students' reaction was surprisingly positive and it was decided that the campaign should be organised.

MONDAY. The empathy week started with a morning ceremony during which the concept of empathy was explained and the importance of appreciating other people was discussed. During the same day campaign posters were put up on the walls. The posters, which illustrated different ways of expressing emotions, had been designed earlier by students in art classes and in the meetings of the student body.

TUESDAY. During the second day, everybody would use the formal pronoun "te" (corresponding the French "vous") when addressing each other.

WEDNESDAY. The third day was devoted to conversation. There were informative posters on the walls with this message: To be able to understand another person you first have to learn to talk and to listen. The teachers tried as much as they could to take part in all conversations, even during the breaks.

THURSDAY. The whole idea of the week was to start from formal politeness and then to go step by step deeper beneath the surface. The theme of the fourth day was affection. Everybody brought his old teddybear, doll or toy car - everything sweet and lovely was brought to school. Only aggressive toys were forbidden. It was a very positive experience to see boys who were generally known as troublemakers, carrying around their old teddybears and even playing home and dressing dolls.

FRIDAY. The climax of the week was Friday's masquerade. Everybody, including the teachers, was dressed up in the most fantastic outfits. In the afternoon there was a party where everyone could join in a round dance. Also the polonaise had been practised for the occasion. That Friday nobody wanted to go home from school.

On the following Monday a follow-up meeting was arranged to sort out the positive and negative experiences of the campaign week. The students' statements were positive.
An interesting aspect was that there was less absenteeism than usual during the week. It was also notable that for once it was not in to be tough. There were some who tried, but they did not get any support so finally most of them, too, joined the campaign. Those who worked for the campaign in that school felt strongly that the campaign had brought the students and the teachers closer to each other and probably also improved student to student relations.

The headmasters were asked to produce reports on the campaign in their schools and teachers received questinnaires regarding their attitudes towards campaigning in schools in general and towards the empathy campaign. The teachers were asked to appraise on a five-dimensional scale the usefulness, necessity and support to school work of the campaigns.

The aim of the study was to examine the empathy level of school students and the influence of the empathy campaign on the development of empathy.

Empathy

Empathy is a coherent process within an organism; attempts were made to separate its physiological, kinaesthetic, affective, and cognitive aspects. In general, the physiological and kinaesthetic aspects are often ignored in definition of empathy although they may be implicit in the definition (Kalliopuska, 1983). It has been

considered that affective elements of empathy include sensitiveness to another person`s feelings (Olden, 1958; Greenson, 1960; Schuster, 1979; Rogers, 1980), ability to share another person`s emotions (Schafer, 1959; Greenson, 1960; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967), and momentary identification with another person`s status (Fenichel, 1945; Schafer, 1959; Mayman, 1967; Beres & Arlow, 1974). An experience of true empathy is further supplemented by cognitive factors like consideration for another person`s point of view (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1969; Borke, 1971; Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1976; Iannotti, 1978) and another person`s social role (Selman, 1971; Hoffman, 1975; Kohlberg, 1976).

Empathy can be consciously developed in childhood, young age and adulthood. The earlier the empathy education begins the more established the learning results will be since the structure of personality is still flexible at younger age. Restraining aggressive behaviour is the general pattern of childrearing. Preventing undesirable behaviour, however, does not automatically lead to the adoption of socially acceptable forms of behaviour. An empathetic way of life should be introduced to children and young people as a positive alternative to aggression. Empathy acts as a hindrance to aggressive behaviour, and, at the same time, as an incentive for prosocial behaviour and respecting of other people. By increasing empathy alternative positive habits of behaviour may be formed. An empathetic individual has developed the prerequisites for choosing the most appropriate pattern from different ways of coping, the aggressive choice is the last one he will resort to. Conflicts between people in the society can be reduced through empathy and empathy prevents problems from growing all too aggravated. Friction between people exists even in all empathetic community - at home, in school, at work - but the conflict solving methods respect other people.

In emotional education empathy has a central role. Empathy provides the basis for developing positive attitudes since the emotional component is generally attached to attitudes. Respecting and appreciating other people as well as high moral principles are all built easily on positive emotional basis. Empathy is not the privilege of professional helpers to be fostered through exercise. Empathy is the possibility for everyone, for ordinary people, to mental growth, to self-awareness and thereby to respecting and appreciating others as human beings.

Procedure

The aim of the study was to examine the prosocial behaviour of school students and, in particular, their empathy degree and the influence of the empathy campaign on the development of empathy. The prestudy was carried out in the Helsinki capital area in December 1981 and partly in January 1982. The test group consisted of twenty schools in the four cities of the capital area. The students tested were fifth graders (aged 11-12),eighth graders (aged 14-15) and higher secondary school second graders (aged 17-18). The prestudy was made on 665 students of whom 49% were girls and 51% boys.24 % of the students were from Swedish speaking schools. The control group was formed equivalent grades in three schools in Lahti (a city 100 km north of Helsinki) - altogether 92 students of whom 54% were girls and 46% boys.

The empathy education campaign varied a lot in intensity in different schools: the mildest campaign consisted of a hedgehog poster on the wall and a morning ceremony; the most intensive campaign was a week long theme program on empathy. No campaign was directed to the control group.

The poststudy was made in September 1982. Part of the students of the prestudy dropped out due to remaining in the same grade or absenteism. The methods used were the Mehrabian-Epstein 33-item scale on emotional empathy and appraisals by the teachers and the fellow students on prosocial behaviour. In the peer nominations each student was asked to name three other students in the class whom he considered the most understanding, considerate, encouraging, kind, benevolent, helpful, friendly, polite, responsible, able to support the group spirit and to adopt another student's situation. A weighted sum total of selections was counted for each student in the following manner: Every time a student was placed first he received five points, when he was placed second he received four points, and when he was placed third he received three points. This selection value was divided by the total of selections minus 1 and multiplied by a hundred. The teachers appraised the prosocial behaviour of students on a five-step scale. The same dimensions were applied in the peer nominations.

Results

The results were examined with regard to sex, age, native tongue, place of living, the test group and the control group and the intensity of the campaign as well as the teachers' attitudes to this campaign and other campaigns arranged in the school.

Girls were significantly more empathetic than boys according to the self-reports and teachers' appraisal. Also peer nominations showed that girls were more capable than boys of understanding others, of kindness, keeping up solidarity and adopting another student's role. The results of the test group and the control group were similar. Empathy average scores seemed to increase with

age up to the age of 19. The same trend was shown in scores according to grade in a way that the higher secondary school 2nd graders were more empathetic than the lower school level 5th graders. The Swedish speaking students were, according to their self-reports, more empathetic than the Finnish speaking students - the differences being greater in boys. Students who were empathetic according to their self-reports were considered empathetic also by their fellow students. Those given low scores in the peer nominations had similar results of the self-reports.

The effects of the campaign were examined on the basis of the changes in the empathy scores between the prestudy and the poststudy. There were no statistically significant differences between the test group and the control group according to the total scores of self reports. There were differences, however, in the subscales of empathy. The emotional receptiveness of the test group boys had increased during the campaign significantly more than that of the test group girls or of the boys or girls of the control group. The changes were greatest in the low grade students of the test group; their emotions rejecting and denying had decreased. The intensity of the campaign affected changes in the self-reports. The most even development of empathy took place in the group which had the most intensive campaign; their emotional receptiveness increased particularly. Rejecting emotions decreased most in the group which had a campaign of average intensity. The changes in the control group were similar to those in the test group which had the least intensive campaign.

There were significant positive changes in the students' empathy scores in schools where teachers had generally negative attitudes towards campaigns arranged in schools, including the empathy campaign ("unnecessary","useless","interferes with school work"). This

result is likely to be explained by the fact that the empathy campaign was rather largely experienced in schools as "controlled from a higher level" instead of having been developed inside the school. We tried, however, by all means to avoid too much outside control during the campaign. In some schools an active teacher took personal responsibility of organizing the campaign, with the result that the majority of teachers in that school might not have taken the campaign very seriously. In order to improve the practical organization of the campaign teachers should be convinced of the importance of their personal involvement, or empathy training should be included in teachers`training to make their attitudes more positive.

An effective education campaign must be sufficiently long - at least a week. Through intensive campaigning in schools it is possible to develop the students`empathy, especially emotional receptiveness. In this way we are creating the basis for empathetic listening and understanding. On the other hand, through less intensive campaigns the rejection and denial of personal emotions can be decreased, which makes free emotional self-expression possible. When students have the opportunity to plan the program and to put themselves in the place of another person in role exhange exercises, the campaign will be successful. The students`experience is not reached by simply lecturing or giving out information in morning ceremonies, posters and badges.

Conclusion

In general, the results support earlier research results on the differences of empathy between boys and girls. The results of the study support earlier research reports which have associated the development of empathy with the child`s cognitive development

(Selman, 1976; Hoffman, 1976; Staub, 1979; Derlega & Grzelak, 1982). The most interesting discovery was that empathy can really be increased in schools through campaigns when the campaigns are intensive enough and when the students may take part in the planning and organizing of the campaigns. The results show that empathy can be taught using effective, low-cost campaigns even to large groups of students in comprehensive and senior high school. Empathy is an art which enriches life and brings with it rewarding experiences. It is most useful for both society and the individual when empathy is learned at an early age. It is self-evident that the influence of the school cannot be compared with that of the home, on the contrary, the school should cooperate with the home in developing empathy in children. Empathy should be seen as a natural form of personal development to be started at home at early age and to be continued later in school, because empathy leads the way to humanity.

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TABLE 1: SEX DIFFERENCES IN EMPATHY ACCORDING TO PRESTUDY

	MEHRABIAN-EPSTEIN SCALE			PEER NOMINATIONS			TEACHER'S APPRAISAL		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
GIRLS	76.6	9.3	325	48.5	45.8	328	38.0	7.1	305
BOYS	68.1	8.8	325	37.1	34.0	336	34.0	7.6	314
	$t_{648} = -12.1^{xxx}$			$t_{662} = -3.56^{xxx}$			$t_{617} = -6.82^{xxx}$		

xxx $p < .001$

TABLE 2: EMPATHY ACCORDING TO CLASS

	M	SD	N	t
(1) COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL 5TH GRADERS (AGED 11-12)	70.3	9.1	189	$t_{1,2} = 2.17^{x}$ df = 460
(2) 8TH GRADERS (AGED 14-15)	72.2	9.6	273	$t_{1,3} = 4.18^{xxx}$ df = 376
(3) HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL 2ND GRADERS (AGED 17-18)	74.6	11.0	189	$t_{2,3} = 2.48^{x}$ df = 460

x $p < .05$; xxx $p < .001$

TABLE 3: STUDENTS' DIFFERENCE POINTS (PRESTUDY-POSTSTUDY) ON THE FACTOR EMOTIONAL RECEPTIVENESS

	SEX(A)	M	SD	N	t, F
	GIRLS	0.4	2.6	284	
	BOYS	-0.2	2.6	288	$t_{570} = -2.70^{xxx}$
GROUP(B)					3,5% risk
TESTGROUP	GIRLS	0.4	2.6	245	$F_A = 7.04$
	BOYS	-0.3	2.6	255	$F_B = 1.24$
CONTROL GROUP	GIRLS	0.6	2.4	39	$F_{AB} = 0.16$
	BOYS	0.2	2.2	33	

TABLE 4: STUDENTS' DIFFERENCE POINTS (PRESTUDY-POSTSTUDY) ON THE FACTOR REPRESSION AND DENIAL OF EMOTIONS

	SEX(A)	M	SD	N	t, F
	GIRLS	0.2	1.7	284	
	BOYS	0.7	5.4	288	$t_{570} = 1.50$
GROUP(B)					6% risk
TESTGROUP	GIRLS	0.2	1.7	245	$F_A = 2.45$
	BOYS	0.5	2.5	255	$F_B = 2.86$
CONTROL GROUP	GIRLS	0.3	1.9	39	$F_{AB} = 2.44$
	BOYS	2.2	14.4	33	